

“ON CHARITY“

A Dialogue By Joseph Nunez



Gustave Doré, 1890

*Cuius vita despicitur, restat ut eius praedicatio
contemnatur*

Persons:**Pauper****Patrician****Gypsy****Scholar****Guards****Thug**

[A large bustling plaza, with light foot traffic. Foliage and red tinted brick accent the spacious plaza. Four ornate arched gates allow pedestrians to come and go as they please. A PAUPER lies in one of the decorative arches, he is unshaven and dirty. Bells can be heard chiming, the sun is barely rising over the mountain ridge. Merchant booths line the high castle walls that border the space. ENTER PATRICIAN, dressed formally, he walks with his head held high, he is very confident]

Pauper: *hands extended, voice raspy* Dear father will you please spare some coin?

Patrician: *smiling brightly, empathic* Poor lamb! Why, if it were up to me, none would suffer such poverty. While charity is not beyond the means of my political power, *pompously* I think that one should practice charity in their personal life as well. Yes yes, I'm very charitable. *reaches into coin purse and generously fills the paupers cupped palms*

[The PATRICIAN walks over to large marble idol and kneels before it piously]

Patrician: *Prays*

[ENTER GYPSY, a man with long black hair and tan skin. Dressed modestly. He pulls behind him a wooden cart in great disrepair. He is selling miniature hand carved idols. As he pulls the cart to the center of the square, a wheel comes loose and the cart falls over, spilling the miniatures onto the floor]

GYPSY: Oy! Goddamn! *nostalggically* Why this farce day after day? *sits on the adjacent stairs and pulls out a leather wine skin* I work all day for coin and then I buy drink.*takes a drink* If I'm not allowed to enjoy the drink I

buy with my coin, then I would certainly be miserable!

continues to drinks cheerfully

[PATRICIAN finishing his prayers looks annoyedly over his shoulder. His expression is disgust.]

Patrician: *Approaches the gypsy* You there! *points* I assume this your handiwork *gestures towards the cart and spilled idols*

GYPSY: *quickly puts away the wineskin* Yes father, this is the product of my labor. *smiles* I carve them by hand, each one of them. Given your position in the clergy, are you interested in purchasing one of these pieces?

Patrician: *stern* No. I don't mean the figures. I mean this mess. Clean this up before the officers make their rounds. If you're seen in this condition you'll certainly be flogged.

Gypsy: *embarrassed* I apologize sir. But the officers rarely make their rounds here. Fortunately, my drink does not interfere with my trade. The guards, so hungover from their debaucherous nights, rarely make their rounds in this square. And why would they? Their efforts to beat back the swarm of undesirables are in vain. I come here to avoid their persecution. *smug* Here I am safe.

Patrician: *disgusted* Contemptible fiend! Your complacency is grossly offensive. It is true then, everything I've heard about *emphasis* *your kind*. How pitiful it is to live a life consumed by vice. No cultivation of soul nor of mind. *Scoffs* I stand here compelled by your sheer ignorance. Does that make me a fool?

Gypsy: *confused* Certainl...NO sir! Certainly NOT sir!
struggles to repair the cart

Patrician: Look at you drunkard. I shall not give you anymore of my time. *motions to the pauper* come here peasant. Spit on this man. Go ahead, do it.

Pauper: *obediently spits on the gypsy*

Patrician: *lecturing* It is the duty of respectable people to shame the behavior of the piggish and uncouth. *to the gypsy* Now I will forget thee and carry on my professional errands. *walks away*

Gypsy: *wipes his face then belches loudly* Coward!
yells louder COWARD! *points and begins to draw attention*

Patrician: *glares at the gypsy, huffs loudly, proceeds to walk away*

Gypsy: *drunkenly stands with a wooden idol in hand, charges the patrician from behind* YAAH! *smashes an elbow into the patricians spine knocking him to the floor, proceeds to hit him with the idol covering the figure in blood*

Patrician: *turns over and struggles with the gypsy who has mounted him* Get off me you fucking savage! *two men pull the gypsy off him*

Gypsy: *alarmed at the sight of blood, rushes back to his cart*

Patrician: *startled* Guards! GUARDS! *rushes away*

[Exit PATRICIAN]

[Enter SCHOLAR, dressed modestly, with a writing tablet and a large book under his arm. There is uncertainty in his gait as enters the square]

Pauper: Spare some coin, my brother?

Scholar: *digging through his pockets* I have no coin to spare. I'm very sorry.

Pauper: Then profess a bit of your knowledge upon me, lest we leave without any exchange of sorts.

Scholar: *prophetically* The learned will always be as poor as the unlearned. For intellect never amounts to coin. It is true I have made myself very miserable in my studies, and not any richer.

Pauper: Go then, may you earn enough coin to become charitable.

Scholar: God willing.

[As the SCHOLAR moves away from the PAUPER his eyes fall upon the GYPSY anxiously struggling with his cart on the floor]

Scholar: *remarks to himself* What a pitiable sight, it would be good-natured of me to offer my assistance *approaches the gypsy*

Gypsy: *exaggerated* Eternal woe is me! Answer me god, what has a loyal servant like I done to deserve such treatment?

Scholar: What is the reason for your woe peddler?

Gypsy: The cruelties of man. Just a few moments ago a wicked patrician kicked over my cart and savagely assaulted me! To think such men govern us....fills me with indignation.

Scholar: *Bitter* Our society proves itself to be the most corrupt with each passing day, yet that's all the more

reason to exercise good will. May I assist you sir? *begins to help pick up the scattered miniatures*

Gypsy: How admirable the youth is! *exaggerated* If only ALL men were as good intentioned as you. Surely the world would be a better place. *turns back towards the SCHOLAR and quickly drinks from wineskin* I am certainly indebted to your kindness, however shall I repay thee? *drinks once again*

Scholar: No compensation is necessary. My soul is nourished....such is payment enough.

Gypsy: So amiable! If you won't accept coin then take this idol as a symbol of my utmost gratitude *hands him the bloodied idol*

Scholar: I appreciate the gesture, though I never said I WOULDN'T take coin. I digress though...*fails to notice the blood*

Gypsy: It is true what they say, modesty is very becoming in the youth.

Scholar: *lifting the cart upright* Whatever you say.

Gypsy: You've done it! With style! Allow me to reward you further with a drink from my wineskin! *hands the scholar the flask*

Scholar: *lifts the wineskin to his mouth then peers inside* Why...there's nothing in here!

Gypsy: Oh how foolish of me! It seems that I have forgotten to replenish my supply. Fear not, this is an easy fix, I will run back home and replenish my wine. Then you will have your hearty swig. *skips away joyously*

[exit GYPSY]

Scholar: *shields face from sunlight* Damn, I wonder when he will be back. *picks the cart up and wheels it into the shade*

[Enter Patrician]

Patrician: *angrily strides into the square, he mutters* Where the hell is that damn gypsy.... *approaches the scholar* *critically* what are you doing with that cart?

Scholar: Excuse me? I'm simply watching it for somebody.

Patrician: You mean that gypsy? That bastard! Do you realize he's taken you for a fool?

Scholar: I'm no fool, I am here solely on a errand of my own free will and good intention. I take it you're the cruel patrician he mentioned. Leave now, I can't stand to be in the presence of wicked men. *waves him away*

Patrician: Watch your mouth boy. That gypsy is bad news. I did nothing wicked to him by any means, in fact he attacked me! I am compelled by the law to punish such vile individuals, for they are the stains that tarnish the reputation of our city-state.

Scholar: It appears the gypsy was wrong...not only are you wicked, but you're unjust, and a liar too! I want nothing to do with you or your kind. *smug and orating* As a public servant you owe your position to me, that is how our republic is ran. I have no time to mingle with corrupt theocrats. *sticks up nose*

Patrician: Is this what the academy teaches it's pupils these days? To loathe those who grant them the privilege of their studies? I'll crucify those professors if that's the message they convey! I cannot permit such dissent to arise in our society, no absolutely not. What is your name boy, I'll personally have you expelled.

Scholar: *pompous* I am a philosopher, that is all you need to know. I encourage your actions, for if you do so, you'll just prove my point.

Patrician: And that point is?

Scholar: That you're a barbarous tyrant. Why exercise power if your only aim is petty malevolence? That is no way to govern. That is no way to live.

Patrician: *chortles loudly* You naive child! You wouldn't know the first thing about tyranny or governance! Yes you may study governance with your tutors, but to govern, to be the tyrant, that is an entirely different practice.

Scholar: Yes that is true, I may not know how to govern, but I have studied man's nature, such insight may prove useful in a position of power.

Patrician: Men are often not what they seem. Human nature is meaningless when one governs. That is the first thing I learned and you will learn soon enough.

Scholar: The young will take the place of the old eventually.

Patrician: *pauses* You're right. But my work will live on. The organization of the government in its current state is noble and shall never be disturbed.

Scholar: I do not intend to disturb it, rather reform its imperfections.

Patrician: That is where you are wrong, nobody has the power to reform such things. If a system is flawed in its

conception then that's the way it will always be. Goodbye pitiable youth. *turns and leaves*

[Enter GUARDS]

Pauper: Spare some coins sirs? *extends hands*

[The GUARDS refuse to acknowledge the PAUPER]

First Guard: *Sees the patrician and marches up to him*
You requested us sir?

Patrician: *spitefully* I did. That peddler over there *points to the scholar* was the one that attacked me, he's quite drunken as well. Start making your rounds in this plaza again, it has gone to shit.

First Guard: We will handle this sir. *salutes then marches away*

Patrician: *takes a seat on a bench and watches the guards from the far end of the plaza*

[Enter THUG, he closely watches the PATRICIAN without being overt]

First Guard: *begins to seize the scholar*

Second Guard: *prepares leather restraints*

Scholar: Hey! Leave me be, i've done nothing wrong!
struggles against the first guard

First Guard: Please do not struggle, there's no point. We will only flog you harder for the trouble you've caused us.

Scholar: You've mistaken me for another! Just wait that gypsy will be here any moment now. *looks around frantically*

Second Guard: Shut up you vile beast *slaps the scholar across the face* your kind shows no self respect even when caught in a bold-faced lie *picks up the bloodied idol*. Nothing shall sway us from completing our duty. *Binds scholar to a flogging post and removes his dress shirt*

Scholar: NO! No! Stop! I've been framed! *distressed*

First Guard: *to the scholar* Do you need to be gagged?

Scholar: *Yells loudly* You bastards! This is an abuse of power! This is an atrocity!

First Guard: *gags the scholar* There we go. If only you had stayed quiet.

Second Guard: *Retrieves the whip of nine tails*

Scholar: *eyes fill with terror as he sees the whip. His cries are muffled*

[All the while the THUG is slowly inching closer to the PATRICIAN. A small crowd has gathered around the SCHOLAR. The PATRICIAN is watching intently and doesn't even notice the

THUG eyeing his fat coin purse. Just then the THUG makes a move towards the PATRICIAN and draws a bludgeon]

Thug: *bluntly* Your coin purse now. *draws a bludgeon and makes a threatening gesture*

Patrician: Oh! Guards! Guards! Quickly! *stands up startled*

Thug: *bashes the patrician over the head with the bludgeon, immediately the patrician is knocked unconscious and falls to the ground. *grabs the coin purse and walks away coolly*

[Exit THUG. The GUARDS begin flogging the SCHOLAR. Muffled cries can be heard over the curious chatter of the public. Red slashes erupt from the SCHOLARS back as the GUARDS bring down the whip swiftly. There is great calamity. So much so that the guards and the audience fail to notice the PATRICIAN's body that lays dead on floor. The PAUPER remains in the decorative arch watching these events pensively. He does nothing.]

Pauper: *reflectively* These men and their respective efforts to become something more than themselves have been thwarted by the nature of their peers. They never realized that to separate oneself from one's peers is a crime punishable by death. *woefully* It is true, we are aboard a

sinking ship. The powerful and the intelligent are always the first to jump overboard. But while they drown below, those who remain aboard shall assume the helm, and drive the vessel into calmer waters. Old order is erased and new order is introduced. When the new order is ushered in, all there is left to do is to await its expiration. This is how it seems to me.

[Both bodies are dragged away. The clamour of high noon resumes]

[END]